

ACS provides smiles, assistance

by Rachel Newton

Helpful assistance, friendly smiles and a shoulder to lean on during the rough spots in military life are just a fraction of the services that the Army Community Service office provides to families at Pine Bluff Arsenal.

"Basically, any ACS service that is available to the military is also available to civilians and contractors," said Jan Brewer, social service assistant. "Not many people know that our services are available to anyone who needs them."

Brewer explained that ACS equips people with the skills and support they need to face in their daily lives. "We tackle everything from relocation and deployment to personal assistance," she said.

In the area of Soldier or civilian deployment, ACS provides support before the deployment, while the individuals are away, with reunions and by assisting with Family Readiness groups.

"We help the waiting families and friends cope with their loved ones departure, the time away and reintegration upon return," said Brewer.

ACS also provides information or referral services such as consumer information, resources for special needs and employment information.

"For instance, if you had a member of your family that had a special need such as asthma, our office could help you find local services," said Brewer. "We even provide assistance to individuals who need social services information such as WIC."

Financial readiness is just another of the many services ACS provides. Jo Anna Franklin, social service assistant, said that classes are offered periodically on various topics dealing with personal assistance. "We have Lunch and Learn classes occasionally on such topics as debt and checkbook management, credit education and money management," she said. Franklin is also the person to contact for consumer information.

ACS also provides a small appliances loaner closet for individuals who are in need of items. "Recently, we had a soldier's wife who's microwave went out," said Brewer. "We were able to lend her one until she was able to buy one."

Merrie Vannucci is another member of the ACS staff. Vannucci's role is one of family advocacy. "She provides special needs support to families," said Brewer.

Issues such as child abuse prevention, spousal abuse prevention and many other programs are handled by Vannucci.

The ACS volunteer program is headed up by Franklin. "The volunteer program offers individuals the opportunity to help out in all areas of the services we provide," she said. "Everything from job skills and training to networking is offered to our volunteers."

Other programs that ACS provides is the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), which provides assistance for family members with special needs, respite care and support groups.

Job training, job searches and resume help are also provided by ACS.

Army Family Team Building is also a vital part of their mission. Available to both civilian and military, this program helps empower families for the future, according to Franklin.

“Each level of classes deals with various aspect of military as well as civilian life,” said Franklin. “Everything from learning military terms and acronyms to listening skills, leadership skills and political issue and the Army are offered.”

Each set of classes deals with specific areas. Level I deal with individuals who are new to the military or federal work. Level II deals with a greater spouse experiences and offers classes in stress management, time management and family readiness groups. Level III enhances more community experiences with classes in Army organization, building self esteem and leader roles.

Relocation readiness is another program ACS offers to incoming families, civilian and military alike. “We provide group training for pre/past moves,” said Brewer. “Guidance, counseling and advocacy are also offered before, during and after the move to any individual seeking it.”

Army Emergency Relief is also provided by the ACS office. Available to military only, AER provides financial assistance to Soldiers and their families if the need arises.

“Please come visit us, we offer a variety of services for the military and civilians to help with life’s hurdles,” said Jerry Pye, ACS director.